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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PRISTINA 000194

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DEPT FOR DRL, INL, AND EUR/SCE, NSC FOR BRAUN, USUN FOR DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI, USOSCE FOR STEVE STEGER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/12/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV MOPS UNMIK YI

SUBJECT: KOSOVO: A/S FRIED TELLS SERBS AND ALBANIANS TO REJECT ALL EXTREMISM AS DECISION ON KOSOVO STATUS NEARS

REF: PRISTINA 169

Classified By: COM TINA KAITANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During his March 6-8 visit to Kosovo, EUR Assistant Secretary Daniel Fried warned both Albanians and Serbs to make sure that extremists from both sides do not raise tensions in the run up to the decision on Kosovo's final status. Serb leaders from the north were resolute in their refusal to accept the Ahtisaari proposal; southern Serbs were more pragmatic in wanting the best for their communities out of any deal. Kosovo's Albanian leadership pledged they were ready to attend the final round of negotiations in Vienna on March 10 and promised, despite some reservations, to accept the Ahtisaari package as "the formula for Kosovo's independence." Fried found KFOR prepared to handle any major threat to a safe and secure environment in northern Kosovo, though COMKFOR (protect) cautioned that he may need political help if some participating contingents demur on taking immediate action while they wait for instructions from their capitals. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) A/S Fried held extensive discussions with Kosovo government officials, KFOR, and representatives from Kosovo's Serb community both north and south of the Ibar River during his March 6-8 visit to Kosovo. He also visited Decani Monastery in western Kosovo and met with Bishop Teodosije and Father Sava. The visit received wide coverage in both the local Albanian and Serbian language media, including a 30-minute interview on RTK with A/S Fried, broadcast in prime-time.

Kosovars ready to accept Ahtisaari proposal

¶3. (C) A/S Fried assured members of Kosovo's Unity Team (as well as President Fatmir Sejdiu and Prime Minister Agim Ceku individually) that resolution of Kosovo's status is at its final stage and that the USG will see it to the end. He warned that tensions at this final stage will escalate on both sides, noting that as the process concludes Serbs will be increasingly desperate, some EU countries will be nervous, and Russia will be waiting for Kosovo's leadership to falter so that it can call for further delay. Fried underscored that the U.S. would wait for Ahtisaari's status

recommendation and then at the right time express its support for that recommendation clearly and publicly. Fried also asked that Kosovo government leaders consider the reactions of audiences both at home and abroad in crafting their response once Ahtisaari's recommendations are made public, advising them to be conscious of their obligations to their minority communities and not triumphalist. Fried noted that Kosovo's initial reactions will make instant headlines in Europe and elsewhere, and asked that the Unity Team not let extremists like Albin Kurti and his Self-Determination Movement define Kosovo to the rest of the world.

¶4. (C) Sejdiu told A/S Fried that members of the Unity Team were ready for the final meeting with Ahtisaari and the Belgrade delegation on March 10 and would be willing to accept additional changes, within reason, if Belgrade presented specific ideas. He maintained that the Kosovo government would have an inclusive approach to all the communities here, not only with Serb community representatives like Bishop Teodosije, but also with ordinary people. He also noted that Kosovo will build strong relations with its neighbors, but believed that the U.S. could help them implement the 2001 border agreement between the then-FRY and Macedonia. Similarly, in their private meeting, PM Ceku expressed reservations to Fried over those portions of the Ahtisaari proposal dealing with the dissolution of the Kosovo Protection Corps, acceptance of the 2001 border agreement, and the size of the special protection zones around Serbian Orthodox religious and patrimonial sites, though he agreed that in the end, these were a cost worth paying for status.

¶5. (C) A/S Fried told the entire Unity Team that it should

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continue to reach out to moderate Serbs, like Serbian List for Kosovo and Metohija (SLKM) party leader Oliver Ivanovic. He also applauded opposition leader and Unity Team member Veton Surroi's proposed efforts to discuss Kosovo's final status with PermReps of UN Security Council members the week of March 12. Main opposition leader Hashim Thaci intimated privately, however, that the price of his continued participation in the Unity Team after Ahtisaari submits his package would be the formation of a government of unity with senior coalition party the Democratic League of Kosovo.

(Note: At a March 8 follow-up meeting, COM told Thaci in very clear terms that the USG opposed formation of a unity government at this time, given the impact on stability and the need to project an image of Kosovo's maturity during a very sensitive time. End Note.)

A/S Fried assures Serbs that the international community will stay

¶6. (SBU) A/S Fried assured Kosovo Serb leaders in northern and southern Kosovo that the USG believes the Ahtisaari proposal is the best way to ensure the long-term preservation of everything that is Serb in Kosovo: the Serb people, their communities, schools, cities, language and cultural heritage.

He told them that the international community and KFOR will stay as long as is necessary to implement the proposal and make this a reality, adding that Kosovo's status was not the end, but rather the beginning of its path towards the EU. In response to specific concerns expressed by the Serbs, A/S Fried assured them that the package will not cut their ties to Belgrade, and said that the international community will be here to assist Kosovo Albanian leaders with its implementation. He urged Serb leaders to engage and participate in this process, noting to the northern mayors specifically that they should think twice about their actions in the coming weeks since it is "easy for any fool to start a war."

¶7. (SBU) Responses from Serb leaders varied. All were adamant that they oppose independence, but most added that they were encouraged by his words about USG support for their

long-term presence in Kosovo. Some, like Bishop Teodosije and Father Sava, along with SLKM leader Oliver Ivanovic and moderate southern Serb Vesna Jovanovic, were willing to engage in constructive discussions about concrete proposals to improve the lives of Serbs here. Jovanovic raised the issue of financial assistance to new Serb majority municipalities, noting that a sewage system was a critical priority for the citizens of Partesh. She also put in a pitch for the Gjilan/Gnjilane villages of Silovo and Pones to join Ahtisaari's proposed Novo Brdo municipality. However, others -- including the three northern mayors Dragisa Milovic (Zvecan), Slavisa Ristic (Zubin Potok) and Velimir Bojovic (Leposavic) -- hewed closely to the official Belgrade position, insisting that the provisions of the Ahtisaari plan are &unacceptable8 to Serbs in toto because they will lead to independence for Kosovo. The mayors claimed that Serbs would use only non-violent, democratic means to further their objectives, though Ristic and Bojovic were careful to add that they would use force to protect themselves if Albanians try to &take control of what they have.8

¶8. (SBU) Bishop Teodosije, Father Sava and Ivanovic asked A/S Fried for USG support for the nascent Serbian National Assembly (SNA), the inaugural session of which Ivanovic was forced to postpone after hard-liners pushed their way into the hall and verbally assaulted organizers and participants on March 4 (reftel). A/S Fried told all of his Serb interlocutors that the USG supports the democratic right of all people to organize, assemble freely and engage in discussions about their future. He made it clear that extremism on either side will not be tolerated, and specifically expressed his condemnation of the SNA disruption to the northern mayors, who looked uneasy at the reference.

KFOR in a better place than a year ago

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¶9. (C) A/S Fried visited Camp Nothing Hill (CNH) in Leposavic, KFOR's only permanent base north of the Ibar River. In addition to the half-battalion sized force located at CNH, there are four other battalions (German, French, Greek and a combination of Norwegian and Danish troops) stationed at bases south of the Ibar who patrol north of the river and could be deployed to reinforce CNH within three hours. Nothing Hill's Forward Operating Base commander (German) and the commander of the (rotating) U.S. contingent there briefed A/S Fried on KFOR's operations north of the Ibar. Currently, there are four full platoons at CNH conducting patrols: two U.S. platoons with 45 soldiers; one German platoon with 22 soldiers; and one Austrian platoon with 31 soldiers. The U.S. contingent has 20 Humvees, the German contingent has seven wheeled 4x4 vehicles and the Austrians have four armored personnel carriers and 2 tactical wheeled vehicles.

¶10. (C) Troops from CNH perform 15-20 patrols per day, including three one-hour visits daily to Gate One, the primary entry point from Serbia to the northern municipalities. (NOTE: Until the end of February, CNH had provided a permanent presence at Gate One. The U.S. company commander said that his troops could return to Gate One, but it would reduce their ability to conduct patrols. END NOTE).

The CNH commander said that the current UNCivPol formed police unit (riot-trained police) currently at Gate One is composed of Pakistani and Bangladeshi police. The base commander described for Fried the contingency plan to perform a blocking mission at Gate One (or further south along that main road, depending on the circumstances) in case belligerents attempt to cross into Kosovo through the gate; he was confident that CNH troops could hold this position for three days, and longer with reinforcements.

¶11. (C) Interlocutors also discussed the expiration in May 2007 of Germany's permanent presence at CNH. An Italian Operational Reserve Force battalion will arrive the end of

May and stay for 30 days, resulting in a three week gap. A/S Fried expressed concern about the timing for transitioning responsibility for CNH to another nation and introducing new troops unfamiliar with the area at this particularly vulnerable time. COMKFOR LTG Roland Kather (protect) and KFOR COS BG Albert Bryant separately told Fried that NATO is currently looking for a member nation to agree to provide a permanent headquarters element for CNH after the Germans depart.

¶12. (C) A/S Fried and COMKFOR also agreed that there are concerns over potential KFOR passivity and reluctance to demonstrate strength and resolve in northern Kosovo against Serb checkpoints and restrictions on movement due to national caveats, whether spoken or unspoken. COMKFOR reassured A/S Fried that KFOR would not hesitate to act, but added that he would need strong political support to pressure some of the contingent commanders to act aggressively and not drag their feet while they conferred with their capitals. COMKFOR said that he would use non-caveated national contingents to ensure freedom of movement in the north, and A/S Fried promised the USG would engage politically with its allies, if necessary.

¶13. (C) At a dinner with international representatives including SRSG Ruecker and PDSRSG Schook, as well as at a subsequent meeting with local Contact Group liaison office heads, there was general agreement that KFOR's posture was robust and that KFOR could handle most military eventualities dealing with freedom of movement, absent a broad breakdown of law and order in Kosovo. There was greater concern, however, with the range of possible political provocations that might be staged by Serb hardliners in the north; all noted that the U.S. and EU countries would need to react strongly to such provocations or risk a correspondingly bad response from Albanian extremists poised to assert their presence in the north. In this, Belgrade's actions -- to either encourage or dissuade Serb hardliners from pursuing a violent course -- would be critical, making it important to express these redlines to Belgrade repeatedly and forcefully.

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¶14. (SBU) This cable has been cleared by A/S Fried.

¶15. (SBU) U.S. Office Pristina does not/not clear this cable for release to U.N. Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.  
KAIDANOW